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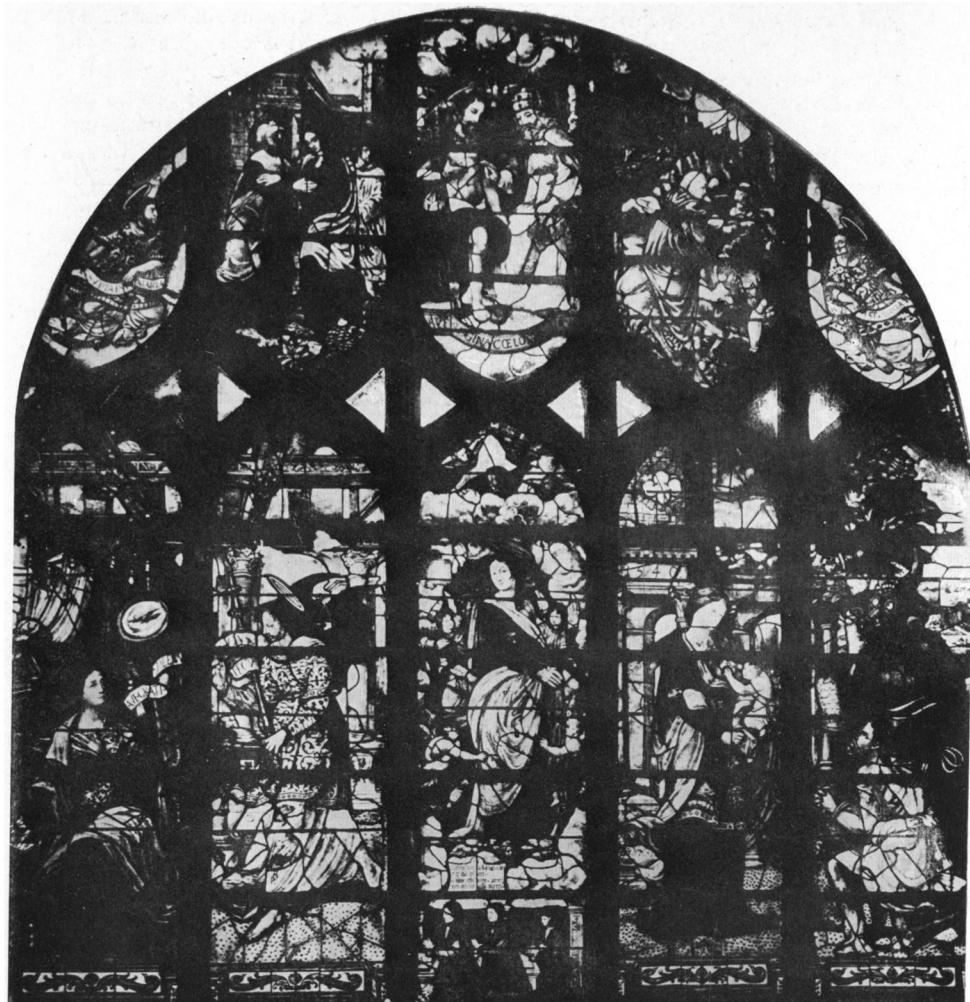
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A MASTERPIECE OF THE 16TH CENTURY, SIGNED BY JEAN PRINCE: DATE 1540; FRENCH. PRINCIPAL SUBJECT, THE ASSUMPTION AND THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE VIRGIN MARY

STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

BY TABER SEARS

TREASURER OF THE NATIONAL SOCIETY OF MURAL PAINTERS

CHRONICLERS have told us that the Emperor Justinian caused many pieces of varicolored glass to be placed in the window of Saint Sophia at Constantinople, and the inhabitants of the city marveled at sight of the gorgeous rays of light coming from the sky.

Gregory of Tours built the basilica of St. Martin of Tours in the sixth century and mentioned its stained glass as prominent among its beauties. The Basilica of Saint John Lateran at Rome and the earlier Saint Peter's were likewise embellished, and it is recorded that Charle-

magne employed it for the Cathedral of Aix-la-Chapelle.

Glass making was an accomplished art among the countries bordering on the Mediterranean Sea. From Egypt, Greece and Rome came glass in the form of jewels, or mottled like agate and onyx, or in layers of different colors, fused together by fire, with many threads of pattern between. It is not improbable, then, that the graphic art of painted glass was known to them, who wrought so skilfully in the material.

It is well along in the 12th century, however, that we find the earliest windows. Churches and monasteries which had brought more than one art through the Dark Ages were their chief shelter. France, England, and part of Germany had settled into civilization, establishing their towns and trade routes. But it was not until the Crusades that intercourse between Western Europe and the East began to stimulate the arts of the newer countries. The artists of Byzantium, finding a new market for their wares, renewed their work and influence in the windows which we are to consider.

From the remote confines of the Western Roman Empire the Romanesque and the sturdy Norman architecture had arisen. Gothic developed from them, very simply, at first, until within two hundred years it became the miracle of floriated forms and intricate stone tracery which we know as "decorated" and "perpendicular." The nearer it was to Paris the more ornate it became, as a rule.

In many ways the few resources of the glass painter of the 12th and 13th centuries were aids to the decorative quality of his product. Management of lead, iron and glass were not, at any time, a matter of facile manipulation, and whether he would or not, the artist was constrained to design his windows in broad and simple effects, with few colors of glass. Perforce, the use of straight iron holding bars, the glass which he found difficult to cut, and the lead joints not easy to adjust, aided him to work out a monumental composition, with little opportunity for ineffectual detail. Byzantine tradition he accepted and carried out.



FIFTEENTH CENTURY GOTHIC WORK. FRENCH

The painted drapery of his figures hung in simple tranquil folds, and the slight evidence of rounding surfaces he encom-



MASTERLY EXAMPLE OF ITALIAN RENAISSANCE WORK FROM THE CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA NOVELLA
AT FLORENCE

passed with a few well-considered lines, meant as shading. The early Christian mosaics of Ravenna, Rome, and Sicily reveal a similar treatment, even in such different material. The artist was satis-

fied to portray on glass the accepted human expression of his saints, as tradition had bequeathed to him an expression severe, earnest, and, at its best, reverential. The features of the faces were denoted

in lines, and the hair in serried wavy forms. The cross, the crosier, the tree and the sword were, by the same frank methods, given prominence in the composition and retained their decorative value as units. The birds and the beasts of Biblical story were put forward that all might see, and that none should misunderstand the parable. To make it all more evident, the names and texts were plainly shown as decorative bands or scrolls. Emblems were often enclosed in circular or other geometric forms, adding strength to the composition. By these methods they were enabled to design elaborately, with many subjects, yet without confusion. There was no extensive variety in the colors of glass. White, deep blue, a pale olive, and brighter greens, light blue, and a rich deep red were almost all that were used. The white was in reality rather ivory in tone, or sometimes greenish, but always of interesting texture. Faces were painted on this glass, the light and shade done in brown tones, which when well fused in the kiln became permanent.

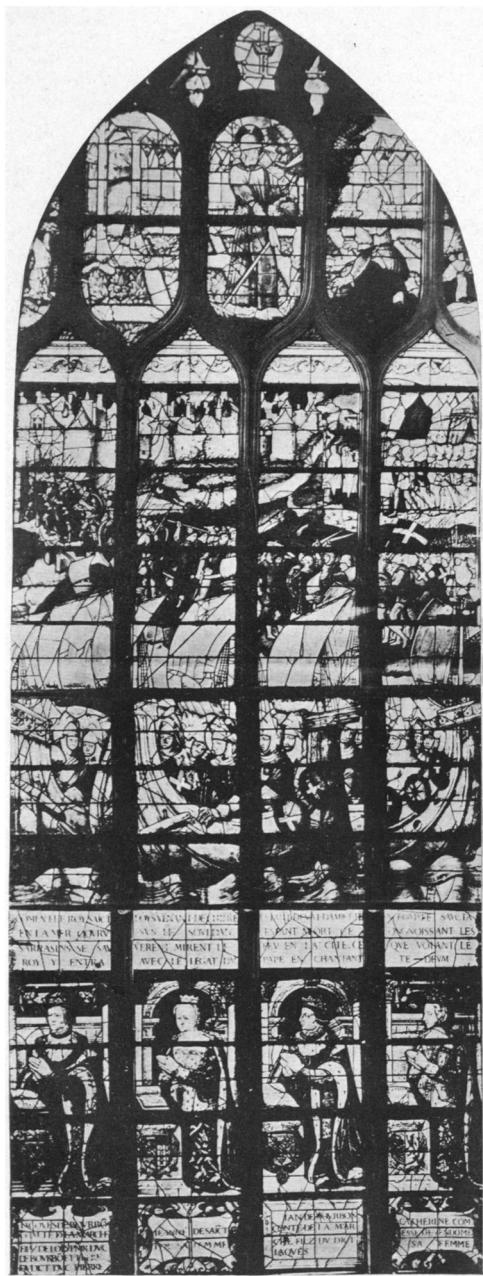
We should remember that during these centuries the supernatural played an important part in people's lives and thoughts. Supernatural protection was their only recourse against the Devil who appeared, they believed, at any hour of the day and in least expected places. The intervention of the miraculous was their reliance, so they implored the aid of the Saints according to need. Wrong-doers, with whom we may include unscrupulous rulers, were held in check by the same current beliefs. In a civilization of uncertain personal safety these matters were all important to them. Grotesque figures intended to resist the Devil, or to represent the inhabitants of a malevolent world, came to appear in the forms of ornamental sculpture and occasionally in glass.

The size of windows increased with progress in church building. Earlier churches contained smaller windows, for in southern countries the intense sunlight had to be shut out. With architecture developing toward the north, and in the land of gray skies, the window open-

ings could be made larger. Designers of glass found their opportunity here for monumental compositions, and the close bonds between people and Church were the cause of a constant demand for their industry. An interesting account is given of the Cathedral at Saint Denis, near Paris, and of the Abbé Suger who built it. These are his words: "We have caused to be painted a numerous and varied series of new windows commencing with the Tree of Jesse at the apse of the church and ending with the window over the principal door. These windows are the work of a great number of very able masters belonging to different countries." Owing to the wear of centuries, and to restoration, very little remains of the original work, but the occurrence reveals the enthusiasm of the time, and the extent of the practice of the art.

In the Cathedral at Chartres there are 1,350 subjects in 143 windows. York Cathedral has 117 subjects in one great window. Canterbury, Lincoln and Salisbury have beautiful examples of early glass. There are many more in France—too many to be recorded at this time—and often the same workmen had windows in different towns. They traveled about in companies or guilds. In the event of an English military invasion of France they carried on their peaceful craft in England, and during a tranquil season across the Channel there they were.

It is of this epoch that subjects in medallions are typical. Circles alternated with squares to the full height of the window, each space having its story from the Old or New Testament, with connecting patterns of ornament. The figures were smaller, of course, when so enclosed, but the orderly repetition of forms and colors, and the assembling of so many pieces of glass, resulted in magnificent harmonies carried aloft in varied courses. The great number of subjects in Chartres Cathedral were made up in this way; indeed Chartres is pre-eminent for Biblical legends in medallion windows. Glass of unusual thickness and radiance was used, and very substantial leading; in fact, so excellent was the workmanship in windows of this date that they are likely



THREE SUBJECT WINDOW FROM CHAMPIGNY-SUR-VERDE
A RENAISSANCE DESIGN IN A GOTHIC WINDOW

to outlast those of a century later. It was expensive; the best art usually is, but to-day, visitors at Chartres attest that it was worth while.

By the 14th century glass painters had by new methods developed the art. Larger pieces of glass could be made, and thus opportunity was given to paint more elaborately and more delicately. By means of the newly discovered process of silver staining, brilliant yellow hues were used to accent the white glass or to transmute a blue to a green, or to enliven a deeper tone. No entirely yellow pot metal glass ever had the serene glow of this golden stain, which like the pigment used for shading was burnt in, in the kiln, at great heat. There was need of greater skill and improved material to keep pace with the development of Gothic architectural detail. Draughtsmanship became very accomplished and facial expressions, the human figure, its robes and accessories, were skilfully rendered. Intricate damask patterns were painted in brown, or in gold stain on various colors of glass, often on white, and ecclesiastical vestments were adorned with a profusion of painted jewels and ornaments. The painter on glass progressed with the painter on wood or canvas. There are examples of his art which recall the qualities of those of the Van Eycks or of Albert Dürer. Fortunately, the material conditions of the craft were the means of conservative development. Windows were still simply composed as to their general plan and forms, even though their details were so elaborate.

Historical subjects were the first radical addition to traditional windows. They form an interesting commentary on the trend of thought in the 15th century. Traditions of royalty found place in the churches, notably at Champigny-sur-Verde, where episodes in the life of Saint Louis, king, were fully set forth in a masterly series of windows.

Meantime from Italy the spirit of the Renaissance began to influence the arts of the Northern countries. Francis I of France was foremost in patronizing the artists of the older country, and by the year 1525 glass painting began to take into account the classic pilaster and frieze, and the graceful lines of Renaissance art. It was possible to render them with the painted line instead of the lead

line, and variations in light and shade were painted rather than pieced together with glass of different hue. Very often the new round arched style was used for the pointed arched windows of lingering Gothic. Of course it didn't fit, but it was the fashion, so the Crabeth brothers used it about the year 1555 for their skillful work at Gouda, in Holland. By degrees it became adapted to the new conditions and from the British Isles to Central Italy we come across many noble specimens of the new method. William of Marseilles had been called to Italy by Julius II, and probably with Claude executed some windows for the Vatican at Rome. The splendid Renaissance windows at Arezzo and in several churches of Florence are undoubtedly his, and date from 1511. They combine brilliant color, with thoroughly good design reinforced by vigorous lead work, and the figure subjects show dignity and power. Vasari the historian says enthusiastically of the Aretine windows, "these are not glass, but marvels rained down from Heaven, for the consolation of mankind." For adjustment of scale in ornament to architectural surroundings, as well as for great skill in execution, the work of Giovanni da Udina, in the Laurentian Library at Florence, was quite as noteworthy.

The spirit of the Reformation was not a stimulus to ecclesiastical art in any field. But in secular forms painted glass flourished steadily. Oxford and Cambridge in England, churches in the Low Countries, and the chateaux of France became the repositories of much dextrous work. Sir Joshua Reynolds prepared for New College some splendid oil paintings, with the Virtues for subjects, but the rendering in glass was most inadequate. The use or misuse of glass was approaching its lowest ebb, due mainly to cheap materials and lax standards of workmanship. As in our own time, unprofessional competition, only too willing to furnish a supply of meaningless scenes, at so much a square foot, reduced it to the commonplace. In matters of business we are prompt to turn to the man of affairs rather than to the artist; let us carry our foresight a step further, and in matters

of art consult the artist rather than the man of affairs.

The modern awakening of interest in stained glass as a fine art is largely due to the initiative of the prerafaelite group of devoted artists in England. About fifty years ago Edward Burne-Jones, at the instance of his friend Rossetti, designed some windows following the early examples, and in after years contributed many more to the art of his country. Painted glass of European manufacture is usually of excellent technical finish. Under its native soft gray skies it is at its best. The brilliant sun of our own land tends to disintegrate its composition, especially in its black painted surfaces in sudden contrast with the glare of white glass. The details of its delicate *grisaille* often fuse in a cold, unpleasant glitter.

America is most fortunate in possessing the great achievement of the late John La Farge. With his mastery of color he created new forms of devotional beauty unsurpassed since the Renaissance. Mr. A. C. Benson has referred to the intellectual activity of recent decades as a new Renaissance, devoted to the extension of humanitarian principles which may be compared for importance with the Renaissance of the 15th century. In this activity, now so marked in America, the interests of art bid fair to become co-extensive, as in the previous era. We have lived bravely through the period when our churches seemed more churchly if devoid of beautiful things, as a previous age outlived the apparition of the Devil. To be sure, the life of the cloister has not its prominence of past centuries, and the changing aspects of our civilization require new activities of religious life. Religious unity develops, not because a few men say it should or should not, but as spiritual needs in various parts of our country become similar, requiring similar ministrations. To make clear a spiritual need, and to portray a personal type which shall embody it, is the supreme usefulness of ecclesiastical stained glass. To create, within its scope, new forms of devotional beauty is to offer a short path to understanding, and a stimulus to zealous living.